DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 414 95 EA 005 883

AUTHOR	Schofield, Dee
TITLE	Conflict Management in Education. NAESP School Leadership Digest Series, Number 10. ERIC/CEM Research Analysis Series, Number 12.
INSTITUTION	National Association of Elementary School Principals, Washington, D.C.; Oregon Univ., Eugene. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	75
CONTRACT	OEC-0-8-080353-3514
NOTE	32p.; A related document is EA 005 882
AVAILABLE FROM	National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209 ($2.50, single copy; $24.00 plus postage, series of 13 reports)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Conflict; *Conflict Resolution; Dissent; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interpersonal Relationship; Organizational Effectiveness; Organizational Theories; School Administration; *School Community Relationship; Social Problems; Social Psychology; Student School Relationship; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; Values
IDENTIFIERS	*Conflict Management

ABSTRACT

Since the school administrator cannot avoid conflict, it is imperative that he or she be prepared to cope with it when it arises and, if possible, before it develops. More than simple coping with conflict, an administrator needs to know how to channel conflict toward constructive ends. Conflict theory is given primary attention in this paper in order to provide school administrators with a conceptual framework within which to analyze the conflict-laden events and situations that arise in daily administration. It is essential that administrators be apprised of the complex nature of conflict and of its underlying dynamics, so that they come to see opponents not as enemies but as fellow human beings subject to the same forces that they themselves are subject to. (Author/WM)

ED101414

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Conflict Management in Education

school leadership digest

Dee Schofield

EA 005 883

Prepared by
ERIC Clearinghouse on
Educational Management

Published by
National Association of
Elementary School Principals

2

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 74-80574
NAESP School Leadership Digest Series, Number Ten
ERIC/CEM Accession Number: EA 005 883
ERIC/CEM Research Analysis Series, Number Twelve

Printed in the United States of America, 1975
National Association of Elementary School Principals
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, Virginia 22209

The material in this publication was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the National Association of Elementary School Principals for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the National Association of Elementary School Principals or the National Institute of Education.

CONTENTS

Foreword	v
Introduction	1
The Theory of Conflict	4
The Psychology of Conflict	7
Perception	7
Aggression and Hostility	8
Threat and Anxiety	10
Subjectivity and Judgment	11
The Sociology of Conflict	13
Conflict within the Community	14
Restraining Influences in Conflict	19
Conclusion	23
Bibliography	25

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the National Institute of Education. ERIC serves the educational community by disseminating educational research results and other resource information that can be used in developing more effective educational programs.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of several clearinghouses in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966. The Clearinghouse and its companion units process research reports and journal articles for announcement in ERIC's index and abstract bulletins.

Research reports are announced in *Resources in Education (RIE)*, available in many libraries and by subscription for $42.70 a year from the United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Most of the documents listed in *RIE* can be purchased through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, operated by Computer Microfilm International Corporation.

Journal articles are announced in *Current Index to Journals in Education*. *CIJE* is also available in many libraries and can be ordered for $50 a year from Macmillan Information, 216R Brown Street, Riverside, New Jersey 08075. Semiannual cumulations can be ordered separately.

Besides processing documents and journal articles, the Clearinghouse has another major function information analysis and synthesis. The Clearinghouse prepares bibliographies, literature reviews, state-of-the-knowledge papers, and other interpretive research studies on topics in its educational area.

FOREWORD

With the *School Leadership Digest* series, the National Association of Elementary School Principals adds another project to its continuing program of publications designed to offer school leaders essential information on a wide range of critical concerns in education.

The *School Leadership Digest* is a series of monthly reports on top priority issues in education. At a time when decisions in education must be made on the basis of increasingly complex information, the *Digest* provides school administrators with concise, readable analyses of the most important trends in schools today, as well as points up the practical implications of major research findings.

By special cooperative arrangement, the series draws on the extensive research facilities and expertise of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. The titles in the series were planned and developed cooperatively by both organizations. Utilizing the resources of the ERIC network, the Clearinghouse is responsible for researching the topics and preparing the copy for publication by NAESP.

The author of this report, Dee Schofield, is employed by the Clearinghouse as a research analyst and writer.

Paul L. Houts
Director of Publications
NAESP

Stuart C. Smith
Assistant Director and Editor
ERIC/CEM

INTRODUCTION

> I say that those who cavil at the dissension betwixt the Patricians and Plebeians, cavil at the very causes which in my opinion contributed most to [Rome's] liberty; for whilst they object to them as the sources of tumult and confusion, they do not consider the good effects they produced; seeming either to forget, or never to have known, that in all Commonwealths, the views and dispositions of the Nobility and Commonalty must of necessity be very widely if not totally different; and that all the laws which are made in favour of liberty, have been owing to the difference betwixt them.
>
> Niccolo Machiavelli, *Political Discourses*, Book I, Chapter IV

> This is war . . . . I want the most comprehensive notes on all those [in the Democratic Party] who tried to do us in.
>
> Richard M. Nixon, as quoted in *The White House Transcripts*, September 15, 1972

Conflict is a fact of life. It is as unavoidable as the proverbial death and taxes, and it is as integral a part of democratic society as freedom of speech and belief. As political scientist Seymour Lipset states, "The existence of a moderate state of conflict is in fact another way of defining a legitimate democracy." According to Lipset, democratic policies and law (as well as Machiavelli's "liberty") are the products of conflict. In order for these essential forms of government to exist, conflict must not be stifled.

Conflict is also a way of life in American schools, just as it is in the American political system. Indeed, it seems many times that the schools take the brunt of community hostility and tension. The school is one of the most important institutions in the community. Its actions (or lack thereof) are highly evident, even to those citizens not directly involved in school activities. As Spillane states,

> A school system is also involved with that part of the community which is not a direct user of its services . . . . The elderly woman who has had her bag snatched by an "unidentified

> youth" or has been frightened by abusive language from a crowd of unruly teenagers, must somehow be persuaded to vote yes (or at least stay home) during the next bond issue, yet she undoubtedly blames the school for these incidents.

The school is an easy target for such hostility because, unlike many of the social institutions that affect modern life, it is readily accessible. The school represents "the system" to many people. It is aligned with government at local, state, and federal levels, and, hence, the frustration that many Americans feel toward big government and impersonal bureaucracy is vented on the schools.

But perhaps most importantly, the schools are (for better or for worse) the shapers of young lives, as well as the perpetuators of cultural mores and traditions. Since Americans have always believed that education is the means of creating a better society while preserving what is good in the old, the schools are thus charged with this almost impossible task. Expectations are high when the school is involved, and such high expectations lead perhaps inevitably to disappointment. This disappointment often takes the form of frustration and hostility and, therefore, results in conflict.

Noting that "we . . . live in a time of enormous public frustration," Spillane states that one reason why the schools are the targets of this frustration is because they are the institutions "most directly concerned with the shaping of the future." He points out that "many of the forces upon which parents have traditionally looked for support in the task of raising their children . . . have all lost their ancient force." Only the school remains (at least externally) relatively unchanged.

These reasons why the school becomes the focal point of conflict are sketchy at best. The literature has little to say on this subject, though it would seem essential for school administrators to know just why they so often end up at the center of community controversy. Although conflict may be a necessary element of democracy, especially American democracy, its results are certainly not always beneficial, as any school administrator knows.

Since conflict is unavoidable for the school administrator, it is imperative that he or she be prepared to cope with it when it arises, and, indeed, even *before* it develops. And perhaps more than simply coping with conflict, he needs to know how to channel it toward constructive ends. Such knowledge is not easy to come by. It in part results from varied experience with the world and the people in it. But it also results from the ability to analyze conflict—to see individual controversies in terms of a larger context and to comprehend the causes behind human behavior in conflict situations.

For these reasons, conflict theory is of the utmost importance. A large body of theory exists, the most valuable of which has come not out of the field of education, but out of psychology, sociology, and political science. Theory is given primary attention in this paper because school administrators need a conceptual framework within which to analyze the conflict-laden events and situations that arise in daily administration. It is also essential that administrators be apprised of the complex nature of conflict. In conflict situations there is always more than meets the eye, and administrators should be able to look beneath the surface to underlying dynamics.

The danger inherent in uncontrolled conflict is obvious to everyone. But few people approach conflict in an intelligent manner; few school administrators study conflict *per se*. And an alarming number of leaders prefer to avoid conflict situations altogether, or to stifle conflict when it can no longer be ignored. However, in these post-Watergate days, the disastrous consequences of avoidance and repression have become painfully obvious to most Americans, especially since these tactics have been carried out on such a large, organizational scale.

Of course, defining the problem does not necessarily mean that solution will follow. But analysis of conflict can give the administrator a different perspective on both the events and the people involved in conflict. Instead of viewing the opposition as "enemies" to be shoved aside or punished, the administrator can come to see them as human beings subject to the same forces (both internal and external) that he himself is subject to.

THE THEORY OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a general term applicable to phenomena ranging from the internal anxieties experienced by all human beings to international tensions, including, of course, war. Because this term is so all-encompassing, it is essential to classify the various levels and kinds of conflict—a task that has generated a plethora of typologies, some of which are helpful to the school administrator and some of which are not.

It is important to make a distinction between *typology* (classification) and *theory*. The classification of concepts into what Dubin calls "summative units" is a necessary step in theory development, but does not constitute theory by itself.

Theory, on the other hand, consists of general, universally applicable principles that underlie observed (and classified) phenomena. It implicitly contains a predictive element. In other words, when these things are present, and, therefore, when these principles are in operation, then these certain things will result.

It is obviously easier to classify than it is to accurately predict, and the literature on conflict reflects this fact. But the school administrator confronted with a conflict situation must take care not to draw inappropriate inferences from his classification. He must not assume that certain results will necessarily arise from certain situations. And once he has classified the conflict, he must be careful to distinguish between formal theory and his own private, subjective set of assumptions that by their very nature may well be inaccurate.

For example, the principal who is confronted with a group of angry black students can begin by classifying this conflict situation as intraorganizational (students versus school administration) and "vertical" (subordinates versus superior). But if he happens to be racially bigoted, his preconceptions (his own informal "theory") about how blacks behave (that they are destructive and impossible to communicate with, for

example) could lead him to predict a violent outcome for the situation.

As a result of this prediction, he might call out the riot squad, complete with tear gas and night sticks, and end up witnessing the very violence that he first predicted (and, indeed, helped to create). The long-range results could well be the escalation of interracial tensions in the school, instead of the amelioration of hostility.

Of course, this example is rather overdrawn, but it serves to indicate that an administrator's set of subjective assumptions that function as theory can often have damaging effects when applied to conflict situations. Formal theory offers a much more accurate (and hopefully constructive) way of analyzing the dynamics of such a conflict situation.

The theories dealt with in this paper may be divided into two groups: psychological theories (dealing with the internal dynamics of human behavior in conflict situations), and sociological theories (dealing with the group dynamics of conflict). These two groups of theories correspond roughly to Derr's two general levels of conflict. On the one hand, intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts are more closely related to psychological theory, whereas intraorganizational, interorganizational, and "revolutionary" conflicts relate more directly to sociological theory.

Of course, a division between the psychology and sociology of conflict is in one sense a false one. Psychological forces are always at work in group conflicts, shaping the outcomes to some extent. But for the purposes of analysis, it is useful to consider the two approaches separately. For example, it is not necessarily legitimate to extrapolate from a psychological theory to a sociological level. What is true for individuals may not hold true for groups of individuals. For the school administrator's purposes, he should be well apprised of both kinds of theory in order to approach conflict in an intelligent manner.

And the administrator should be aware of what is *not* theory as well. Gaming and simulation, for example, are often used in the analysis of conflict and in administrator training,

but they should not be mistaken for theories of conflict. Neither one is predictive as far as real-world situations are concerned.

Gaming is essentially a mathematical theory designed to uncover "the *logical structure* of a great variety of conflict situations" and to describe this structure in mathematical terms, as Rapoport states. Its application to conflict is valuable mainly because it opens the way for the classification of conflicts.

Rapoport cautions that the confusion of game-generated conflict situations with conflict situations in the real world can greatly mislead administrators who look to game theory as the source of solutions to conflicts. For example, the conceptualization of complex political conflict as a giant football game indicates this kind of confusion. The football game is analogous to the simplest kind of mathematical game—the zero-sum game in which there is one winner and one loser, and winning and losing are absolute. The temptation to view complex political situations in such overly simple terms is widespread and can have devastating effects, as the Watergate scandals have shown. The language of Watergate ("team member," "scoring," "carry the ball," "the Big Game") indicates this kind of simpleminded approach to conflict. And the outcome of Watergate indicates the absolute insufficiency of viewing the world in zero-sum, winner-loser terms. The school administrator should be careful not to fall into the same conceptual trap when dealing with school and community controversy.

Simulation is the presentation and playing out of the dynamics of a real-world situation within an artificial environment. It is a useful technique in training administrators to encounter conflict. Through "the intense involvement that is normally produced," participants in simulation learn through active involvement, rather than through passive study, as Goodman, Bonachich, Meeker, Benor, and Clary point out. However, the same caution applied to gaming is also applicable to simulation. The participants must not mistake simulation of reality for the real thing.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONFLICT

Psychological theories dealing with perception, aggression and hostility, and threat and anxiety bear most directly on conflict behavior. The dynamics described by these theories are often in operation in conflict situations, shaping the responses of the persons involved.

Perception

The way in which people perceive conflict and the other people involved in it obviously in part determines their actions and, therefore, the outcome. Perception is not the same thing as "reality," unless, of course, one wishes to define reality in purely relativistic terms. And because two indiviuals in opposition perceive things differently (especially each other), "reality is not the same for observers belonging to different groups," as Stagner states.

The discrepancy in "realities" in such interpersonal conflict situations may be accounted for by the principle of *selective perception.* As human beings process information from the external world, they eliminate some "cues" and emphasize others. Thus, for example, a person favoring censorship can find ample "evidence" to support his position, just as an anti-censorship individual can find ample "evidence" against censorship.

The same principle applies to perception of other people. Research by Haire indicates the obvious phenomenon that human beings perceive their "friends" in very positive terms, while they perceive their "enemies" in negative terms. Haire presented the same photograph of the same man to two groups of chamber of commerce members, asking them to judge his personality. One group was told that the man was the "treasurer of a small local corporation," while the other group was told that he was the "treasurer of his local union."

The first group viewed the man as trustworthy, respectable, and intelligent. But the second group judged the same man to be unreliable, stupid, and aggressive. These judgments were made solely on the basis of the man's organizational affiliation, since no other evidence was available. Haire's results emphasize the importance of preconceived opinions in shaping perception. They illustrate the widely prevalent attitude that "we" are good, and "they" are bad.

The principle of selective perception is applicable on a group, as well as an individual, basis. Thus, the Russians, for example, see the United States government as "imperialistic," evil, and untrustworthy, while Americans view the government of the USSR in exactly the same negative terms, as White discovered.

Closely related to selective perception is *selective recall.* We tend to remember evidence that supports our viewpoint and to forget evidence that opposes our set of assumptions. Thus, selective perception shapes our image of the past as well as of the present.

And it also shapes our future expectations. As Stagner points out, "an image of a person or group, once formed, has strong resistance to modification." The term, *perceptual constancy*, refers to this phenomenon.

On calm reflection, these three principles of perception seem obvious. But perhaps they are not so obvious to the individuals involved in heated controversy. It is essential for the administrator to remember that these principles are in operation, not only within his opponents, but within himself also, and that they affect everyone's behavior in a conflict situation.

Aggression and Hostility

In conflict situations, human beings are in part motivated by the desire to attain attractive ends. However, the more prevalent motivation often underlying interpersonal conflict is aggression as manifest in hostility.

Stagner outlines two steps preluding hostile behavior. First,

"there is a mobilization of extra energy when a barrier is encountered on the way to some goal." If this "energy" finds no constructive outlet, if it is "continued and unsuccessful," then it finds ultimate release in "generalized destructive behavior." The individual is frustrated to the point of destructive reaction—"behavior without a goal." Stagner notes that "this phase of the frustration-aggression cycle . . . represents a social danger."

The individual does not always release his aggressive energy on the source of his frustration. Often this hostility is directed toward a person or thing not at all involved in the original frustration. Thus, the employee wants to yell at his boss, but instead goes home to yell at his wife. The psychological term for this change in direction is *displacement*, and it is the dynamic principle behind scapegoating. The selection of a target for displaced aggression is directly related to perception. If the target (usually another human being) is viewed as an "enemy," or as "less than human," as Stagner phrases it, then the likelihood increases that he will be the recipient of hostile behavior.

Perception affects the expression of hostility in yet another way. As everyone knows, it is often more difficult (if not impossible) to perceive faults in oneself, while it is easy to see similar (or exactly the same) faults in others, especially in one's "enemies." Thus, the proverbial little old lady in tennis shoes who vigorously campaigns for censorship, while keeping close tabs on "pornographic" material, is engaging in *projection*. She denies her interest in such material, while condemning others' interest. Her hostility is directed not toward herself (in the form of guilt feelings), but toward her "enemies."

Both displacement and projection are classic defense mechanisms. They are ways in which potential intrapersonal conflict is turned outward to an external target. And, again, although everyone is familiar with these principles, it behooves the administrator involved in controversy to recognize the role they play in interpersonal conflict. The school administrator or, indeed, the school itself may well be the targets of displaced or projected aggression.

These two psychological phenomena are often causally related to aggression and hostility. The person experiencing anxiety because he feels threatened by something or someone often reacts aggressively or hostilely, even though his aggression may be displaced. But anxiety frequently has a lack of specificity about it. The tensions that build up in an individual are often not attributable to one specific source, but result nonetheless in anxiety. As Stagner defines anxiety, it is "a vaguely comprehended fear of impending disaster"—a feeling that most people living in the twentieth century have experienced.

Anxiety also shapes perception, causing the anxious person to focus on certain "cues" (usually the anxiety-arousing ones) and to disregard other important information from the environment. This kind of anxiety-caused selective perception is called *tunnel vision.* In a conflict situation in which the participants feel threatened, tunnel vision can operate to obscure important elements that should not be ignored, for example, by the administrator attempting to resolve the conflict.

Closely related to tunnel vision is *polarization,* described by Stagner as a tendency to exaggerate "attributes which might otherwise have seemed only slightly good or bad." Stagner and Osgood note that polarization operates on a group, as well as on an individual, level. In times of social stress, collective perceptions tend to be extreme (either for or against), as during the latter years of the Vietnam War, or during the Civil Rights movement of the early 1960s.

When people feel anxious about the society around them, their ability to tolerate ambiguity is sharply reduced. They desire to see things in simple, yes-or-no terms. Thus, as conflict escalates, its participants become more anxious, and, therefore, their thinking becomes more polarized.

The human intolerance for ambiguity manifests itself in a desire for consistency, a fact that Festinger takes into account in his theory of *cognitive dissonance.* Festinger notes that

perceptions consist of "cognitive elements" that may or may not be consonant (consistent) with each other. People tend to resolve dissonance by changing their perceptions.

For example, if a school board member hears that his most bitter critic in the teachers' union is vigorously campaigning for his (the board member's) reelection, dissonance is introduced into his perceptions of the union member. The board member may resolve this dissonance in one of several ways: He can conclude that he has done something "wrong" (that is, something that his opponent approves of). He can strengthen his original negative perception by assuming that his opponent has something up his sleeve and is, therefore, even more untrustworthy than the board member had originally supposed. Or he can alter his opinion (perception) of his opponent, seeing him in more friendly, positive terms. The latter alternative is, of course, the most constructive one as far as amelioration of conflict is concerned.

Indeed, Stagner suggests that the introduction of dissonance can break up an original negative image, opening the way for the creation of a more positive, constructive view, and thus lessen the chance of conflict. The problem is, obviously, how to direct the desire for dissonance reduction into constructive channels.

Subjectivity and Judgment

Although human beings may desire consistency in their perceptions and thought processes, as Festinger points out, the problem of subjectivity is always present. One psychological theory of conflict utilizes the concept of subjectivity as its basis. Social judgment theory maintains that the fallible nature of the human judgmental process is the very source of conflict, even when all consideration of motivation is eliminated. Thus, regardless of the motives underlying perception and judgment (be they self-serving or altruistic), the decision-making process is still fraught with error due to subjectivity, and, therefore, with the makings of conflict. As Balke, Hammond, and Meyer state, social judgment theory "argues that

the nature of human judgment is such that it also provides a prime source of conflict and that many, though not all, disagreements flow from the exercise of human judgment."

This theory of human judgment is certainly not calculated to reinforce the concept of man as a rational, objective creature capable of seeing the Truth. But then again, such an eighteenth-century notion of rationality is an anachronism anyway. The social judgment theorists are correct in formulating the importance of subjectivity and in pointing out that even among the best-intentioned parties, conflict can still arise.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF CONFLICT

The study of conflict as a social and political phenomenon has a rather long and colorful history, though not as long as the history of conflict itself. Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332-1406) was one of the first political historians to formulate a theory of the origin of the state based on conflict. He outlined the patterns of conflict between agricultural villages and the nomadic groups that frequently conquered these more settled societies. Once safely ensconced in the farming villages, the erstwhile nomads became soft and hence easy prey to still other roving nomadic bands. According to this Mohammedan historian, the cycle of conquest repeated itself about every 120 years.

The first sociologist to deal specifically with conflict as a social phenomenon was Georg Simmel. His insights into the dynamics of social conflict are valuable to the administrator analyzing conflict in the schools and in the community. Coser has formulated Simmel's basic ideas into propositions outlining the forces at work in conflict—especially in internal conflict such as that within a school or a community.

Three of Simmel's propositions presented by Coser deal with the potentially constructive nature of internal (interorganizational) conflict. First, conflict is the means of achieving unity through the resolution of differing points of view. As Simmel states, "Conflict itself resolves the tension between contrasts."

Second, if a stable relationship exists between the groups taking different sides in an interorganizational conflict, the willingness of these groups to express hostility toward each other increases. In other words, instead of suppressing potential differences or displacing the aggression and hostility that arises from these differences, this hostility is manifest in a more direct manner. Conflict can actually become the means of strengthening the relationships between groups within the

same organization.

The third proposition follows from the direct expression of hostility. This expression leads to a much clearer definition of the situation out of which conflict has arisen. In turn, this clearer definition means that control processes and accommodation can take over to resolve the conflict, according to Simmel.

Coser outlines two other propositions of Simmel's that deal with the intensity of conflict. First, conflict is more intense among closely related parties. Hence, civil wars are often more intense than wars between unrelated countries. Second, strong ideological elements can increase the intensity of conflict. A current example might be the textbook controversy in Kanawha County, West Virginia. This conflict involves such central belief systems as Christianity and American patriotism. And the extreme intensity of this conflict is indicated by the bombings and shootings that the controversy appears to have triggered.

Conflict within the Community

The intensity of interorganizational conflict is one of the factors that Coleman takes into account in his theory of community conflict, a theory that in part draws on Simmel's work. Coleman outlines patterns in community controversies from initiation through outcome. His research indicates that regardless of the initial sources, once under way, community conflicts are very similar:

> The most striking fact about the development and growth of community controversies is the similarity they exhibit despite diverse underlying sources and different kinds of precipitating incidents. Once the controversies have begun, they resemble each other remarkably.

These similarities allow Coleman to extrapolate certain basic principles of the dynamics of community conflict—principles that operate in widely different community contexts. The pervasiveness of these principles certainly does not mean that all community conflicts take exactly the same course. As

Coleman points out, "the dynamics of controversy *can* be interrupted and diverted—either by conscious action or by existing conditions in the community."

It is the interruption and diversion of conflict that the school administrator should be concerned with. Coleman's theory offers the means of predicting (albeit in general terms) the course of conflict. And such prediction can suggest to the administrator the crucial points at which controversy may be rechannelled into perhaps more constructive ends, or at least into less destructive ends.

Conflict arises from events and incidents that affect the lives of community members in fundamental ways, according to Coleman. He outlines three criteria for conflict-causing events. First, the event must affect "an important aspect of the community members' lives" (such as the education of their children). Second, the event must affect different community members differently, with some standing to gain from it, while others stand to lose. And third, "the event must be one on which the community members feel that action can be taken—not one which leaves the community helpless" (as a flood or other natural disaster would do).

The conflict-precipitating event may come from an internal source (for example, a controversial school bond proposal) or an external source (court-ordered desegregation of the schools, for example). Conflict-arousing events may be classified into three general areas, according to Coleman:

- economic events
- events centering around local power or authority
- events touching on cultural values and belief systems

The controversy in Kanawha County seems to have arisen over this last kind of event (that is, the selection of controversial textbooks). Conflict can also arise from actions or policies of certain controversial groups or personalities. These conflicts draw on the previously existing antagonism of opposing community groups.

Coleman points out that often more than one basis of

response is in operation in community conflict. Thus, some people may respond to a controversial event because of economic reasons, while others may become involved because of cultural values or attitudes toward authority. A conflict over a proposed school budget may include all three elements, for example. Some citizens may object mainly to the increase in taxes, while others may object to the way in which the school board (the power structure) presents the proposal, while still others may object to the values they believe are being perpetuated in the schools. The net effect is still opposition.

Coleman emphasizes the importance of past community conflicts and their outcomes in determining the response to current potentially controversial events. If a community has in the past achieved some kind of unity from conflict, then its members will be more positively disposed toward present incidents. However, if there is a strong residue of antagonism left over from past conflicts, then already-existing cleavages can become even wider. Thus, in Boston, where racial tensions have always lurked beneath the surface, the current violent conflict over school busing seems to be an overt expression of unresolved conflict from the past.

The occurrence of a controversial event sets the stage for conflict. Although the initiation of conflict can assume one of several patterns, Coleman points out that one of the most common patterns of conflict is "revolt against the administration." He presents a recipe of sorts for this conflict pattern. The first element necessary for this kind of conflict is "a few active oppositionists, men who are continually in opposition" to the administration. There must also be a large group—"often the majority"—that is generally apathetic toward the administration, neither opposing nor supporting it. And there must be a minority committed to supporting the administration; often these people "were responsible for putting the administration in office in the first place."

With the occurrence of the controversial event, the administration is placed on the defensive. Thus, the school board that is ordered to implement desegregation by busing has to

defend its actions to the community as a whole. Next, the uncommitted majority becomes committed in one of two ways.

In the first alternative, external events presented through the "national mass media" bring about a "change in the general climate of opinion," eliciting certain fears and beliefs that hitherto had been dormant in the minds of the majority. This shift in community climate is characterized by increased suspicion and mistrust of the power structure in general, including the local administration. As Coleman states, "In this atmosphere, the administration needs to commit only one tiny misstep and the suspicion will be directed against it."

Or, second, the administration itself can precipitate the commitment of the silent majority by making blunders that affect the lives of the citizens it governs. The reaction to the Watergate scandals is the most obvious recent example of this kind of commitment. Although the public's reactions were somewhat slow, the American people eventually turned against the Nixon administration because of its violations of the democratic process. Their disfavor was registered at the polls in the almost across-the-board defeat of Republican candidates associated with Nixon.

Once the majority is involved in the developing conflict, the active oppositionists can step in to "lead the large, mobilized group against the administration and its supporting minority." Thus, in Flint, Michigan, as well as in Boston, the activists opposing school busing have organized large segments of these communities into active protest.

Piele and Hall note that similar dynamics are at work in certain controversial school financial elections. When conflict in the community is high, the normally apathetic majority becomes involved. Hence, a higher voter turnout results. And along with this increase in the number of citizens voting, the likelihood of defeat for the school budget also increases. As these authors state, "An increase in conflict results in high turnout, which, in turn, leads to negative outcome."

The proponents of the administration may also organize segments of the mobilized majority in support of administration

actions, according to Coleman. In Kanawha County, the Kanawha Coalition for Quality Education has rallied support for the textbooks and for the school board members who selected them. In this instance, however, the opposition seems to have won at least part of its battle against the administration. The school board president and the superintendent of schools have resigned under pressure.

In Boston, the civil rights groups that have recently rallied in support of busing are not, strictly speaking, primary supporters of the school administration. But the results of their pro-busing demonstrations seem to be implicit support of the city administration, which is in charge of implementing desegregation. The situation in Boston, however, is rendered somewhat ambiguous by the resistance of some members of the city governing board to forced busing. Nevertheless, the city power structure is still charged with implementing the initial court order and, hence, still stands for desegregation through busing.

Once the conflict is initiated and the sides are defined, certain changes occur in the controversy. Coleman outlines alterations in issues and in social organization as the major changes in community conflicts. First, there is a tendency for initially specific issues to broaden into more general issues. Thus, for example, a disagreement over certain books in the school libraries in Scarsdale, New York, eventually turned into a fight over basic education philosophy, as Coleman notes.

Second, issues quite different from the initial ones enter the scene. The developing conflict seems to offer the opportunity for raising unrelated questions that nonetheless have covertly contributed to community tensions.

Finally, the now-expanded issues become the basis for real antagonism and hostility, instead of milder disagreement. Coleman points out that in part this shift is "involuntary." He suggests that "belief" and "personality" become synonymous as the conflict escalates. The opposing parties find it impossible to separate the two—to disagree with an opponent's position on the issues without directing hostility toward the opponent on a personal level.

The changes in social organization within the community can also be very far-reaching. Coleman notes the pervasive effects of polarization on the social fabric of the community. Associations between persons on the same side of the controversy flourish, while relationships between individuals in opposing camps suffer sometimes irreparable damage. As Coleman states, polarization "tends to alter the social geography of the community to separate it into two clusters, breaking apart along the line of least attachment."

Conflict also tends to foster new leaders as the social structure of the opposing parties becomes firmer. Unlike the pre-conflict leaders, these new ones are not necessarily committed to amelioration of hostilities, but instead can serve to heighten antagonisms. In some conflicts, the leaders of the old order form their own partisan group and aggravate the conflict, just as the new leaders do.

Restraining Influences in Conflict

Thus far, community conflict has been presented in terms of two opposing sides, both of which participate in the escalation process. However, as Coleman notes, a "third side" also plays an important role in conflict. This third side represents the elements of restraint that keep community controversy within certain bounds.

These restraining elements are in part determined by the power structure and its responsiveness (or lack thereof) to the community. If the administration holds complete control over the community (or the school), and if it is unresponsive to the needs of the minority, then this controlled minority will react by "sporadic and irrational outbursts," according to Coleman. This type of reaction is similar to the "behavior without a goal" resulting from inadequate expression of aggression and hostility. The minority in such cases lacks formal organization; it does not constitute an opposition party.

The danger inherent in this kind of unresponsive power structure should be obvious. Few communities can afford the destruction that can result from complete oppression of the

minority. This pattern of destructive reactions seems to be similar to the one acted out in the riots in Watts when blacks reacted radically and violently to what they considered a dominant, unresponsive power structure.

If the administration is unresponsive to its community and if it lacks complete control of its constituents, then the way for organized opposition is opened. If the dissatisfied minority has no means of expressing its dissatisfaction through administration channels, then it must attack the power structure "from the outside" to make itself heard.

The administrator may draw several conclusions from Coleman's observations. First, it is not only ethically palatable to listen and respond to the various special interest groups within the community (minorities), but it is eminently practical to do so, if the administration's intent is to keep conflict within bounds and, thus, to remain in power.

Second, the importance of regular, structural channels for the expression of dissent cannot be overemphasized. These channels are built into the national democratic system, but they are not always so easy to maintain within organizations like the community or the school system. For example, the two-party system is, on a national level, a viable means of channelling dissent. But, as Coleman notes, the two-party system is rarely as practical for small communities in which "there appears to be a rather well-defined set of organizations with highly interlocking memberships." Nonetheless, it is still essential for a local administration to provide a system of redress for dissenting groups.

Such a system of dissent expression can greatly further the process of *co-optation,* as Coleman suggests. Co-optation is "the technique of bringing the opposition inside to voice its criticism." It serves as a kind of safety valve, allowing for the expression (and hence reduction) of hostilities, and for the solution of minor problems that would grow to major proportions if left unattended.

Coleman points out that co-optation can interrupt one of the most dangerous dynamics of conflict—polarization, with its accompanying antagonisms. As he states, "When opposing

groups come face to face, when they are forced to discuss policies, both tend to modify their opinions; they come closer and closer, rather than drifting further and further apart."

Another aspect of Coleman's "third side" can be the social organizations and associations already existing in the community at the start of the conflict. Coleman notes that many people are drawn into controversy not just because they feel one way or the other about the issues, but because their friends (and their "enemies") take certain positions. And, of course, people tend to agree with those they respect—those who in their eyes have prestige.

The majority in part takes its cues from these leaders, even though they may not be formally incorporated into the community power structure. The actions and attitudes of the prestigious members of the community, therefore, can have either an aggravating effect or an ameliorating effect on the course of conflict. For example, the anti-textbook attitude assumed by several of the ministers in Kanawha County seems to have strengthened many community members in their opposition to the school board.

Coleman cites the case of the library book controversy in Scarsdale as an example of the ameliorating effect that prestigious community members can have on the course of controversy. In Scarsdale, the community leaders quickly responded to the critics of the books by strongly supporting the school board. Their action swayed the opinion of a majority of uncommitted citizens in the direction of the school board's decision. The outcome of this conflict was relatively peaceful and resulted in the overwhelming reelection of the school board members.

It would seem valuable for the school administrator to maintain good relations with community leaders, both within and without the formal governmental structure. When controversy arises, he can then approach these leaders for support, and even if disagreement exists, he is at least in the position to utilize the technique of co-optation to soften differences.

The social phenomenon of identification is also involved

in the community associations that function before and during conflict. Coleman notes that the more strongly people identify with the community, the less likely they are to engage in violent behavior once controversy arises. This identification acts as a restraining influence, even though it may in part serve to initiate conflict. As Coleman states, "Communities whose members are highly involved will have more controversies, and feelings will be more intense about the issues, but these controversies are likely to be carried on within ordinary democratic processes without degenerating into a 'fight to the finish'."

The administrator who encourages involvement in, and identification with, the school or the community may, therefore, find that the frequency of controversy increases, but that such conflicts are not as destructive. Indeed, this kind of identification and involvement is at the heart of Lipset's concept of the constructive role of conflict in a democracy. It opens the way for co-optation, and it militates against complete power structure domination.

CONCLUSION

This paper has emphasized theory, perhaps at the expense of practice. But by now it should be evident that a simple, "how-to-do-it" approach to school and community conflict is an impossibility.

The fact is that conflict, by its very nature, is as complex and obscure as the human beings that create it. Regrettably, this fact is often not taken into consideration in the literature on conflict in education. Much of the literature dealing specifically with conflicts faced by the school administrator tends to make rather dull reading. And, more importantly, it indicates a simple-minded approach to conflict that has no place in the complexity of the real world.

For example, one author suggests that the principal can resolve conflict within his school by placing a large easy chair in his office. People bringing their complaints to the principal's office will sit in the chair, and of course their hostility and discontent will miraculously disappear once they are comfortable and relaxed.

Melancon quite rightly intends to offer an alternative to "the ostrich approach" to conflict by listing activities that will alleviate student tensions. However, his list includes such activities as "slave auctions," which he recommends for racially integrated high schools: "This activity," he states, "I would not recommend unless the tension was near a riotous situation." It is in one sense unfair to note the unintended humor in Mr. Melancon's suggestion. But it *is* necessary to note the inappropriateness of such an overly simple approach to conflict.

Certainly not all suggestions in the literature on conflict in education are as inane as the two presented above. The literature can offer the administrator the opportunity to keep abreast of conflicts faced by other schools and communities across the country. It behooves him, for example, to know

what is going on in South Boston, not because exactly the same events could occur in his own community, but because such events in part shape the attitudes of people toward schools and toward education in general. As Coleman notes, events occurring outside the community can affect events within the community. Therefore, the administrator should always be aware of shifts in attitudes and values, both of lay men and women, and of educators (including himself).

But perhaps more than simply keeping informed on conflicts within and without his community, the administrator needs a healthy respect for the people and events that make up his daily administrative existence. He should realize that those people (again including himself) and those events always hold the makings of conflict. The administrator should know enough to see what's coming and to respond intelligently and compassionately once the action has commenced.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Many of the items listed in this bibliography are indexed in ERIC's monthly catalogs *Resources in Education (RIE)* and *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)*. Reports in *RIE* are indicated by an "ED" number; journal articles in *CIJE* are indicated by an "EJ" number.

Copies of most ERIC reports, but not journal articles, can be ordered from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. If a report is available from EDRS, its order number and prices are given. When ordering, please specify the "ED" number. Unless otherwise noted, reports are available in both microfiche (MF) and paper copy (HC). Please include check or money order payable to EDRS.

Postage must be added to the cost of all orders. Rates are as follows. Microfiche: $0.18 for up to 60 fiche and $0.08 for each additional 60. Paper copy: $0.18 for first 60 pages and $0.08 for each additional 60.

Address requests to EDRS, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, Virginia 22210.

Angell, Robert C. "The Sociology of Human Conflict." In *The Nature of Human Conflict*, edited by E. B. McNeil, pp. 91-115. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Bailey, Stephen K. "Preparing Educational Administrators for Conflict Resolution." Address to American Educational Research Association annual meeting, New York, February 1971. 20 pages. ED 048 646 MF $0.75 HC not available from EDRS.

Balke, Walter Morely; Hammond, Kenneth R.; and Meyer, G. Dale. "An Alternative Approach to Labor-Management Relations." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 18, 3 (September 1973), pp. 311-327. EJ 086 000.

Coleman, James S. *Community Conflict*. New York: The Free Press, 1957.

Coser, Lewis. *The Function of Social Conflict*. New York: The Free Press, 1956.

Derr, C. Brooklyn. "Conflict Resolution in Organizations: Views from the Field of Educational Administration." *Public Administration Review*, (September/October 1972), pp. 495-501.

Dubin, Robert. *Theory Building*. New York: The Free Press, 1969.

Festinger, Leon. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.

Gold, Gerald, editor. *The White House Transcripts.* New York: Bantam Books, 1974.

Goodman, Robert; Bonachich, Edna; Meeker, Robert; Benor, David; and Clary, Bruce. *SDC School System Crisis Simulation.* Santa Monica, California: System Development Corporation, 1969.

Haire, Mason. "Role-Perceptions in Labor-Management Relations: An Experimental Approach." *Industrial Labor Relations Review,* 8 (1955), pp. 204-216.

Lipset, Seymour M. *Political Man.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960.

McNeil, E. B. *The Nature of Human Conflict.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Melancon, Donald. *A Systematic Approach to Tension Monitoring and Tension Reduction in an Educational Setting.* 1973. 15 pages. ED 081 069 MF $0.75 HC $1.50.

Piele, Philip K., and Hall, John Stuart. *Voting in School Financial Elections: Some Partial Theories.* Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1973. 63 pages. ED 082 282 MF $0.75 HC $3.15.

Rapoport, Anatol. "Game Theory and Human Conflict." In *The Nature of Human Conflict,* edited by E. B. McNeil, pp. 195-226. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

"Schoolbooks That Stirred up a Storm." *U.S. News & World Report,* November 4, 1974, pp. 61-62.

Simmel, Georg. *Conflict.* Translated by Kurt Wolff. New York: The Free Press, 1955.

"Southie Boils Over." *Time,* December 23, 1974, p. 65.

Spillane, Robert R. "Cooling or Coping? School-Community Tensions." Speech presented at American Management Association annual conference, New York, August 1972. 12 pages. ED 070 199 MF $0.75 HC $1.50.

Stagner, Ross. "The Psychology of Human Conflict." In *The Nature of Human Conflict,* edited by E. B. McNeil, pp. 45-63. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Stagner, Ross, and Osgood, Charles E. "Impact of War on a Nationalistic Frame of Reference." *Journal of Social Psychology,* 24 (1946), pp. 187-215.

White, R. K. "Mirror Images in the East-West Conflict." Paper delivered before the American Psychological Association Convention, September 1961.